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ORIGINAL ARTICLE

ANALYSIS OF THE CONCEPT OF BELIEFS UNDER THE LIGHT OF THE EVOLUTIONARY METHOD

ANÁLISE DO CONCEITO DE CRENÇAS À LUZ DO MÉTODO EVOLUCIONÁRIO

ANÁLISIS DEL CONCEPTO DE CREENCIAS BAJO LA LUZ DEL MÉTODO EVOLUTIVO

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to analyze the concept of beliefs employed in Nursing and Psychology. **Method:** this study used the Evolutionary Method of Concept Analysis, through the creation of categories consisting of attributes, antecedents, consequents, and related concepts. Brazilian papers published within the last 10 years were selected in the database Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences Literature (LILACS). The descriptor “belief” was used and, after application of the inclusion and exclusion criteria, 18 papers were found, being 13 on Psychology and 5 on Nursing. **Results:** the main attributes were: the construction of the concept is individual and social, positive and negative, with a short or long length of time. As antecedents emerged individual and social interests, life experience, cognitive information processing, religious factors, altruism, prejudice, and fear. With regard to consequents the higher frequencies concerned actions/practices and behaviors. The related concepts presented the psychological, philosophical, and sociological perspectives. **Conclusion:** the categories related to the concept of beliefs hold similarities, possibly due to their foundation on theories derived from social psychology, also adopted by studies on Nursing. It is believed that these results provide a better foundation on the concept of beliefs, and there’s a need for expanding this knowledge to other areas, aiming to use a clear concept which is pertinently constructed. **Descriptors:** nursing; psychology; behavior.

RESUMO

Objetivo: analisar o conceito de crenças empregado nas áreas de Enfermagem e Psicologia. **Método:** trata-se estudo utilizou o Método Evolucionário de Análise de Conceito, elaborando-se categorias constituídas pelos atributos, antecedentes, consequentes e conceitos relacionados. Foram selecionados artigos brasileiros na base Literatura Latino-Americana e do Caribe em Ciências da Saúde (LILACS), publicados nos últimos 10 anos. Utilizou-se o descritor “crença” e, após aplicação dos critérios de inclusão e exclusão, totalizou-se 18 artigos, sendo 13 de Psicologia e 5 de Enfermagem. **Resultados:** os principais atributos foram: a construção do conceito é individual e social, positiva e negativa, de breve ou longa duração. Como antecedentes surgiram interesses individuais e sociais, experiência de vida, processamento cognitivo de informações, fatores religiosos, altruísmo, preconceito e medo. Para os consequentes observaram-se as maiores frequências em ações/práticas e comportamentos. Os conceitos relacionados apresentaram as perspectivas psicológica, filosófica e sociológica. **Conclusão:** as categorias referentes ao conceito de crenças guardam semelhanças, possivelmente devido à ancoragem em teorias oriundas da psicologia social, adotadas também por estudos da área de Enfermagem. Acredita-se que esses resultados subsidiam uma melhor fundamentação sobre o conceito de crenças, sendo necessária a ampliação do conhecimento a outras áreas, para utilização de um conceito claro e pertinentemente construído. **Descritores:** enfermagem; psicologia; comportamento.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: analizar el concepto de creencias empleado en las áreas de Enfermería y Psicología. **Método:** esto es un estudio que utilizó el Método Evolutivo de Análisis de Concepto, con la creación de categorías que consisten en los atributos, antecedentes, consecuentes y conceptos relacionados. Fueron seleccionados artículos brasileños en la base de datos Literatura Latinoamericana y del Caribe en Ciencias de la Salud (LILACS), publicados en los últimos diez años. Fue utilizado el descriptor “creencia” y, después de la aplicación de los criterios para la inclusión y la exclusión, se totalizó 18 artículos, siendo 13 de Psicología y 5 de Enfermería. **Resultados:** los principales atributos fueron: la construcción del concepto es individual y social, positiva y negativa, de corta o larga duración. Como antecedentes surgieron intereses individuales y sociales, experiencia de vida, procesamiento cognitivo de informaciones, factores religiosos, altruismo, prejuicio y miedo. Para los consecuentes se observaron las mayores frecuencias en acciones/prácticas y conductas. Los conceptos relacionados presentan las perspectivas psicológica, filosófica y sociológica. **Conclusión:** las categorías referentes al concepto de creencias tienen similitudes, posiblemente debido al anclaje en teorías derivadas de la psicología social, adoptadas también por estudios del área de Enfermería. Se cree que esos resultados proporcionan una base más sólida acerca del concepto de creencias, siendo necesaria la ampliación del conocimiento a otras áreas, para la utilización de un concepto claro y construido pertinentemente. **Descriptores:** enfermería; psicología; conducta.

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INTRODUCTION

A concept is created through the multitude of situations, a heterogenesis emerging from events that arouse interest, replacing the notion of truth and becoming subject to appropriation. It is derived from philosophical, scientific, and artistic sources and its meanings are related to life experience, since the creation of concepts consists in producing reality.¹ Thus, defining concepts for Nursing aims at proposing more precise terminologies, in order to facilitate and expand understanding between agents who have influence on health care.²

The development of methods which are able to facilitate the analysis of concepts has proven to be of great relevance in the academic field. Among them, the Evolutionary Method calls attention, because of its systematization and methodological clarity.³ This method advocates an inductive concept analysis, a descriptive research path used to clarify the current status of a concept, identifying a consensus, examining its historical background, and determining convergences and divergences in the use of the concept in several fields of knowledge.⁴

An example of application of the Evolutionary Method refers to the concept of sadness in the areas of Nursing, Medicine, Psychology and Sociology, which provides, at the end of the study, not a definitive concept, but an approximation of the concept's features to the areas concerned, clarifying its current status and favoring its most adequate use and application.⁴

This study analyzes the concept of beliefs. This choice stems from the fact that many researches seeking explanations for the adoption of different behaviors use theoretical frameworks which bring beliefs in their structures. These beliefs are influenced by factors with a different nature and, in turn, start influencing attitudes and behaviors. One may refer family as an influencing root for certain behaviors, as it "is a system in which values, beliefs, knowledge, and practices are combined".^{5:320}

Since Psychology shows to be rich in the application of theories regarding beliefs in their structural framework, it raises the need for analysis on this concept in studies within the area which focus on the adoption of behaviors, seeking to appropriate resignifications, deconstructing obsolete concepts and reconstructing them having scientific researches as a basis. On the other hand, as Nursing provided our academic

Analysis of the concept of belief in the light of the...

training and it is our professional area, it is pertinent, therefore, to enhance the analysis also under this light.

This study becomes necessary and relevant because it analyzes researches which use the concept of beliefs in various scientific fields and in different modalities of interest, as they may include features which are crucial for the understanding of this concept. One expects to add information on beliefs, allowing its later use by researchers. Works with this nature seek to make the concept clearer and free from ambiguities. They are revealing ones and enable contributions from many areas which deal with the handling of this theme, providing visibility to the factors that influence and are influenced by beliefs.

Given the above, this theoretical study was guided by the following question: "Does the concept of beliefs have the same design in the areas of Psychology and Nursing with regard to the attributes, antecedents, consequents, and related concepts?"

Indeed, the aim of this study is to analyze the concept of beliefs employed in the areas of Psychology and Nursing, using as theoretical framework the Evolutionary Method.

METHOD

This study is a concept analysis using the Evolutionary Method, which consists of six steps: 1) identification of the concept concerned and association to substitute terms; 2) identification and selection of the setting, with data collection; 3) identification of attributes, including interdisciplinary variations (antecedents and consequents); 4) analysis of the concept's features; 5) identification of an example of the concept, if appropriate; and 6) identification of implications and hypotheses for the development of the concept.³ The first four steps of the method were successively used. It was considered that there are still no evidence allowing the construction of an example of the concept; and the last step, implications and hypotheses for the development of the concept, is addressed in the discussions.

The first step of the study, as already described, pointed out the concept of beliefs as the topic of interest. For the identification and selection of the setting and for the data collection, the study was delimited to the journals indexed in the areas of Nursing and Psychology available at the database Latin American and Caribbean Health Sciences

Oliveira SHS, Pagliuca LMF, Sousa MJ de et al.

Literature (LILACS), from August to September 2011. This outline was based on the need for further analysis on the papers produced in Brazil, in order to provide a possible portrait of the concept in national researches, considering the peculiarities related to culture, social norms, and the values shared by this society.

The inclusion criteria were: national productions, full texts, and papers published from 2001 to 2011, in order to take into account the current status of the theme. The exclusion criteria were: theses or dissertations, papers not published within the period specified, papers with a superficial approach to the concept and those related to other fields of knowledge instead of Nursing or Psychology.

A total of 568 papers were obtained; due to this range, the collection was refined by adding the term "behavior", generating a total of 87 papers. Of these, 18 papers were included in the sample, 13 on Psychology and 5 on Nursing.

In the selected material attributes of the concept and their contextual basis were identified, including interdisciplinarity and sociocultural and time variations, and the data analysis focused on attributes, antecedents, consequents, and related concepts. One understands as attributes words and/or phrases cited by the authors in order to express developed concepts.⁴ In turn, antecedents are related to situations, events, or phenomena that precede a concept. Consequents may be defined as events or situations from the outcome of what is sought. Related concepts include attributes different from those which are key to the concept concerned.²

Papers which used the term "belief" without a foundation were discarded. Each paper received letters and numbers to designate, respectively, the field of

Analysis of the concept of belief in the light of the...

knowledge to which it belonged and the sequential order in which it was analyzed.

During reading, the attributes, antecedents, consequents, and related concepts were highlighted in the text, assigning sequential codifications to them. These data were extracted and recorded in collection sheets, which contained the papers' codes, the text section highlighted, the concept's features, and the page number of the paper, to facilitate location for subsequent queries needed.

Reviews and rearrangements were performed, in order to reduce polarizations between the findings and to ensure consistent approaches. After this step, a coherent system of categories was created for each aspect of the concept, in each field of knowledge separately, checking the frequency in which they occurred. Those features which repeated at least in two different papers were considered relevant.

Then, the combination of findings took place, through the examination of convergences and divergences between the fields of interest, trying to capture the dominant ideology to identify a consensus and reveal the concept.

For the discussion of results quotes from some studies of the sample were used. Thus, not all quotations referred to papers included in the sample, i.e., studies on the theme outside the sample were mentioned.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The concept of beliefs in Psychology and Nursing

The analysis on the concept of beliefs in the areas of Psychology and Nursing revealed the antecedents, attributes, consequents, and related concepts, being presented in Figure 1 the features which best portray the concept in the papers surveyed.

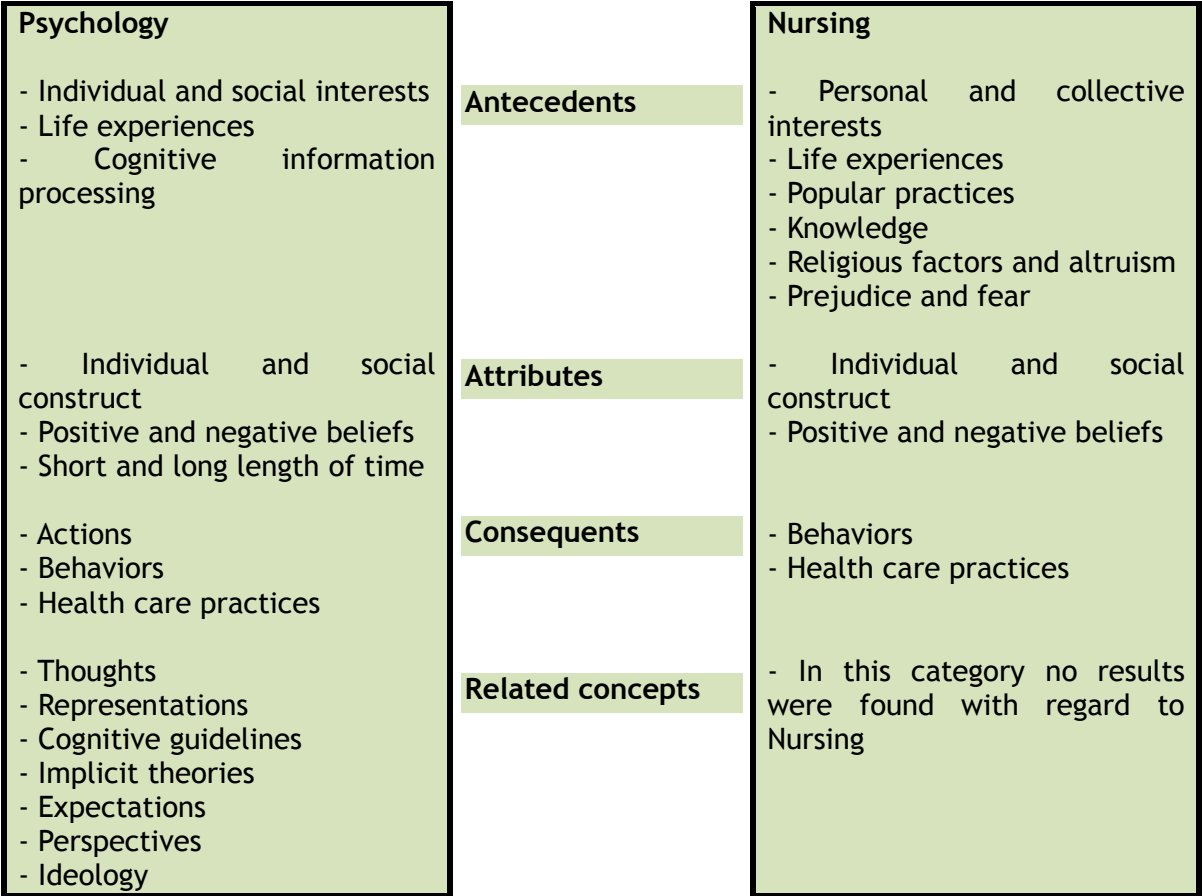


Figure 1. Categories identified through the analysis of the concept of beliefs in publications on Psychology and Nursing according to the Evolutionary Method.

• Antecedents of the concept of beliefs

The antecedents of a concept consist of situations which precede it.^{2,4,5} In the material on Psychology analyzed, 20 elements which antecede the beliefs were identified, and those most frequently found were: *individual and social interests, life experience, and cognitive processing of information*. In the area of Nursing, 8 elements were identified, among which *individual interests and life experience, popular practices, knowledge, religious factors and altruism, prejudice, and fear* were found.

Individual or collective interests showed to be antecedents of beliefs through the understanding that they constitute conscious and unconscious mental activities of the individuals, a product from daily and non-daily life.⁶

Therefore, one understands that the interaction with the environment, as well as the individual features and needs of subjects, become influencing aspects in the establishment of beliefs, because the environmental stimuli and the social relations are configured as key points to the formation of ideas and perceptions.

When the beliefs reflect projections of the aspirations and interests of a social class, they become an ideology, which is characterized as a non-daily life thought.⁶ Beliefs from individual issues refer to what the person believes that will happen when

performing a behavior and her/his assessment of the consequences from this behavior. Moreover, social pressures from significant referents associated to the motivation to agree with these referents constitute the antecedent named collective or normative interest.⁷⁻¹²

The life experiences also constituted antecedents of beliefs.^{8,10,13} Actual experiences of success provide the person with convincing information on her/his ability to face similar challenges and, once consolidated this belief, not even occasional failures can change it. Similarly, vicarious experiments, i.e., those from the observation of models which succeed in similar situations, also lead the person to believe that she/he is able to do the same.¹³

Similarly, aspects of the context in which people live, as well as social and cultural experiences throughout life, were also important variables for determining the beliefs.¹³ However, to influence the formation of beliefs, these experiences need to have a cognitive processing of information and an interpretation and evaluation of the abilities and the task or act concerned.⁷⁻¹³

In papers on Nursing it was found that some *individual practices* influenced by popular beliefs may be used for troubleshooting, when *its efficiency and resolutivity is confirmed* with regard to life experience.⁹ It was also found that knowledge related to the culture of a given community is

Oliveira SHS, Pagliuca LMF, Sousa MJ de et al.

considered a belief, which is devalued or undervalued by health professionals in certain situations, to the detriment of biomedical knowledge.¹⁴

Religious factors and altruism were identified as antecedents to positive beliefs, which also favor the construction of positive beliefs and, in turn, may lead to actions aimed at concern or assistance to the other.¹⁵

One understands that the components identified as antecedents of beliefs comprise a set of elements which are called internal factors, being those inherent to individual issues, related to the processing of information, experiences, differently understood and absorbed, considering the uniqueness of individuals; and external factors, which encompass all the influence from the sociocultural and religious context, in which the subjects are included, on the construction of their beliefs.

• The attributes of the concept of beliefs

The attributes of a concept reveal its nature.² The analysis of the material resulted in the identification of a list with 14 attributes in papers on Psychology and 4 in those on Nursing. In Nursing, the attributes identified were: *individual and social construct and positive and negative beliefs*. In Psychology, the main attributes were the same as those of Nursing, adding up *short and long length of time*.

According to the analysis of the articles on Psychology, individual and social construct are discussed as attributes of the beliefs.⁶⁻⁷ One understands that these constructs were attributed to the fact that the subjects' actions and thoughts are related to what they believe in, and believing depends on the way how they learned to structure thought and on how they perceive the reality in which they live.

The belief constituted by the attribute of individual character relates to what the person believes that will happen when performing a behavior and her/his evaluations on the consequences of it, as well as her/his crucial ideas about her/his life experiences.⁷ As a social or collective construct, it also showed to be associated to normative components, i.e., social pressures suffered by referents and the motivation to agree with them.⁷

In accordance with the papers on Psychology, this construction of beliefs through the sociocultural context was very

Analysis of the concept of belief in the light of the...

cited by papers on Nursing. However, the term *popular practices* emerged as a new factor in these studies, being called a reflection of the transmission of knowledge, traditions, and customs passed on by the family and community along the generations.⁹

With regard to positivity or negativity, one understands that the first is attributed to the belief when it is not alienating nor generates prejudice, turning to the construction of a solidary society which promotes humanization⁶, based on what people believe to be good and value¹⁰ and which positively affect the results.⁷ On the other hand, the belief is negative when it alienates and produces prejudice¹¹, establishing itself as bad or devalued.¹⁰ In this context, some of the papers on Nursing referred again to the term *popular practices*, leading us to believe that they influence the *action's credibility* at the time when the individuals experience positive or negative situations with regard to their fulfillment.⁹

Regarding the duration of beliefs, whose identification of attributes occurred only in articles on Psychology, they may have a short or long length of time, although the higher frequency occurred in the latter. The short one would be subject to change, the long one would be more structured and it would be part of a larger set of ideas.⁶ The long length of time is due to its development, which is processed through the social and cultural experiences throughout life.¹⁰

One believes that short-term experiences may generate fragile and momentary beliefs, and it is pertinent to reflect whether it is actually coherent to name these constructs as beliefs. On the other hand, one agrees that sociocultural processes experienced by a long period will generate more structured beliefs about an object, situation, or context, having positive features or not. Another aspect to be highlighted consists in the lack of clarity on the delimitation of the length of time considered as short or long.

• The concept of beliefs and its consequents

The consequents of the concept under analysis may be understood as situations or events arising from it.² For consequents of the beliefs in the domain of papers on Psychology a variety of 23 elements was observed, but the highest frequencies concerned *actions, behaviors, and practices*. These last two were also the consequents identified in the papers on Nursing.

Actions can be immutable, something

Oliveira SHS, Pagliuca LMF, Sousa MJ de et al.

which occurs when the way of thinking of individuals is crystallized. This thought comes from the understanding that beliefs are accompanied by affection, which consists of two feelings – faith and trust. Faith is rather at the level of the individual/private and it is more dogmatic. Trust is a feeling more related to the experience, morals, and it is more flexible. If the affection is associated to trust, the constructed beliefs are provisional and subject to change when there's a need to change the direction of our action. However, when the belief crystallizes, it becomes a faith act, generating immutable actions, and it may cause pre-judgments or bias, turning it into a non-praxis, a non-changing activity.⁶ The beliefs, be them consciously accepted or not, directly affect actions⁸⁻¹⁰ and guide the subjects' practices. Therefore, changes in beliefs will entail changes in the practices.⁶⁻⁸

Beliefs also subsidize the individual's behavior, being more implicit than explicit, and they bind to behavior, even without the mediation of deciding to do it consciously.⁶ They work as a database which determines behaviors, therefore, new beliefs repertoires may foster a behavioral change.⁷⁻¹⁰

For some papers on Nursing, in-depth understanding of the beliefs developed throughout life subsidizes the *acquisition of information* on determinants of the behavior, since they allow the recognition of factors that induce a person to engage (or not) in a certain behavioral attitude.¹⁶

Based on the understanding that beliefs are determined by factors named as internal and external, generating attributes with different features, such as positive or negative, short or long length of time, it is agreed that they will influence on actions/practices and behavior. However, one believes that the influence they exerted may have a greater or lesser intensity and a shorter or longer length of time, which derive from the individual and collective context that preceded the establishment of this belief.

• The concepts related to the concept of beliefs

Related concepts include secondary attributes, which differ from those crucial to the concept concerned. "Many of these concepts are close to the phenomena they represent, or make connections to the facts or events which one wants to investigate".^{2:83}

The concepts related to the beliefs presented a wide variety. From a psychological standpoint, the term appeared

Analysis of the concept of belief in the light of the...

under the name of thoughts, representations, cognitive orientations, implicit theories, and knowledge, as well as values, expectations, perspectives, and attitudes. Under a sociological or philosophical view, it stood within other broader terms, such as ideology, which may be arbitrary or organic. Being arbitrary, the ideology constitutes itself as superficial and fragmentary with regard to daily life, occupying the individual domain or that of small groups. Being organic, it opposes to the arbitrary one, constituting itself rather as hegemonic and having the ability to become ideas accepted by many social groups.⁶

However, despite a wide diversity of related concepts was identified, the most frequent ones refer to *ideias*^{6,8,10}, cognitive guidelines^{6,10,13}, and expectations.^{6,10,12} It is believed that these designations are closely related to beliefs, as they also come from constructs derived from individual factors, as well as the environment in which they were developed, generating actions/practices and behavior possibly consistent with these constructs.

FINAL REMARKS

The study met its proposed aims, since it was possible to analyze the concept of beliefs employed in the areas of Psychology and Nursing through a comparison between the concept's features. The results provide fundamentals on the concept of beliefs and it was found that Nursing uses theoretical references from social psychology. The Nursing findings which are peculiar to their field involved spirituality, feelings, and virtues, identified in antecedents. In turn, in Psychology one of the attributes involves the belief related to the life story of a human being. Similarly, in consequents, beliefs involving *actions* are the result from normative or subjective factors, which can or cannot undergo changes, differing from what happens in papers on Nursing.

Although this theoretical study does not propose a concept of beliefs derived from the analysis carried out, the findings related to attributes, antecedents, and consequents of the concept are in accordance with the knowledge accumulated over the years, strengthening it. Therefore, significant findings showed that beliefs come from factors inherent to the individual and the sociocultural environment, they may be transient or durable, and they influence behaviors, besides, the results produced change when beliefs undergo some change.

Oliveira SHS, Pagliuca LMF, Sousa MJ de et al.

Thus, these findings have implications for nursing activities, since the actions of health promotion involve processes in health education that aim to promote changes in lifestyle and adoption of behaviors related to beliefs of the person as an individual and social being.

Regarding the theme, the main obstacle to this study was the lack of papers addressing the design proposed, because the comparison of the concept of beliefs between the areas of Psychology and Nursing became a restricted one. However, one believes that there is a conceptual gain to the academic community, highlighting the importance and relevance of the study.

The possibility for further analysis shows to be necessary, in order to expand knowledge to other areas, aiming to use a clear concept which is pertinently constructed. Finally, it was found that there are many factors which determine, characterize, and constitute consequences of beliefs.

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Oliveira SHS, Pagliuca LMF, Sousa MJ de et al.

Analysis of the concept of belief in the light of the...

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